Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

scale, her wide spaces, her inexhaustible variety, in these forty-eight big states compacted into a single nation. A country larger, freer, wilder than the little England whose tongue they speak is asserting its power and scope in the songs they sing.

It may be that the hope of American art—its one advantage, at least, over European—lies in that love of the wilderness which we inherit from the pioneers. We are nearer to wild nature than the crowded old-world peoples, and we still throw off more easily the husks of civilization to build a campfire under the stars. Recently two young poets, both almost penniless, have hiked westward through this office carrying their blanket-rolls; sleeping where they fell after the day's fatigue, trusting to luck for a chance job and meals; tasting of freedom, feeling wide spaces underfoot, wide winds overhead. Let us hope there are few poets so fixed in urban or rural habits that they can not throw them all off for a summer month or more, take a deep plunge into the wilderness, and challenge nature for renewal of life. *H. M.*

ON TRANSLATING CHINESE POETRY

I

In the midst of the little whirlpool caused in affairs poetic by the recent translations of Chinese classical poetry—Waley's, Lowell's and Bynner's—I should like to raise a small voice of caution.

Do not, because this poetry, as it comes to us, is so simple and direct as almost to seem like folk-poetry, be deceived into thinking that you therefore understand the Chinese. Nothing would be more natural, yet to me it seems that few things could be more erroneous.

For the apparent simplicity of these poems is the result of a complexity so great as to be far beyond anything the West has ever produced. Such a poet as T. S. Eliot, in our own day, is still much too unsophisticated to have written a T'ang poem. Far from being folk-poetry, it was written by the emperors and scholars, much as Latin verse was written in the middle ages of Europe by the scribes and rulers. The intricacies of its prosody are endless. So full is it of plays on words, of classical allusions, of double meanings, that even today one of the favorite pastimes of Chinese scholars of the old school is the endless and friendly discussion of the fine points of these poems. Under the old system the entire education of the young consisted in teaching the children to understand them; and now that education has turned in a different direction it is, I think, safe to say that in a few generations there will remain in China only a handful of men able to appreciate them fully.

The very Chinese language in which they are written, which used once to be thought more primitive than ours, because it is not inflected (that is, the tenses of the verbs, the parts of speech, etc., are not differentiated) is now thought by philologists to have gone through our inflected

stage almost before the dawn of history. So that our method of speech became too simple for the Chinese thousands of years ago, and their language went on around the circle to the point where it is found today, in which root ideas only are used, and the rest is left to the imagination. The effect on a westerner is as though they were always cabling, at so much per word.

There are, properly speaking, two Chinese languages now, the written language and the spoken language. The written language is as much more complicated than the other as the most difficult legal phraseology in English is more difficult than ordinary speech. Not only can an uneducated Chinese neither read nor write the written language, he cannot even understand it without explanation when it is read to him, that is, when the syllables are spoken aloud. This has proved very difficult for the missionaries who, in translating the Bible, have therefore felt obliged to make two separate versions, one—which I am told is very bad—in the written language, and one in what is called the "spoken language written down."

The written language has over forty thousand different ideographs, yet there exist only about four hundred word sounds. Each of these words is a monosyllable, polysyllabic words being unknown. Theoretically, therefore, each word-sound has a hundred different meanings. In practice of course this is not so, as the vocabulary of the common people contains very few words, and even a scholar hardly reads more than eight or nine thousand

characters. Yet the humblest peasant knows probably half a dozen meanings for *li*, or a mysterious unpronounceable syllable that sounds like *su* and is everywhere much in evidence. In common speech the Chinese get around this difficulty in a number of ways; for instance, by putting two syllables which have approximately the same meaning together, so as to strengthen the association in the mind. The common pidgin phrase "look-see" is a literal translation of this device for making their own language comprehensible to themselves.

Another, and more far-reaching way, is the adoption of "tone." The same syllable pronounced in differing tones of voice takes different meanings. There are four of these tones in Mandarin, and, I believe, as many as nine in Cantonese. These tones, or rather the forerunners of those used today, are one of the elements of prosody.

I have mentioned these few outstanding complexities of the language itself—and I assure you there are many more—only to show the difficulty of the tools with which the Chinese poet works. Let anyone who finds it difficult to write poetry in English offer praises to Apollo that he is not a Chinese!

The prosody is as complex and difficult as might be expected from a nation which communicates in such a language. Too many better informed persons than I have written about it to make more than the merest suggestion necessary here.

The three major elements used are length of line,

rhyme, and tone. Prosody distinguishes between two tones, a flat or low tone, which in the metrical skeletons is called "ping" and the deflected tones, which include the rising, sinking, and abruptly arrested tones, and are all included in "tseh." These deflected tones are more emphatic, and therefore bear some faint resemblance to our own accented syllables.

A concrete example may make this clearer. Here then is the metrical skeleton of a *tsueh* or four-line poem—one of the standard forms, beginning in *ping:*

ping ping tseh tseh tseh ping ping
tseh tseh ping ping tseh tseh ping
tseh tseh ping ping ping tseh tseh
ping ping tseh tseh tseh ping ping

The first, second and fourth lines rhyme. The third is unrhymed. The tonal pattern is absolutely set, except for six characters, three in each of the middle lines, which may be varied at will. The first and last lines are alike. The third is usually the exact opposite of these two. In content the "short-stop," as it is called, is the first half of a longer poem in which the end is left to the imagination; as with the Japanese hokku, though suggestion has been more highly developed by the Japanese.

I give a literal translation of such a poem by Su Shih (1036-1101) to show the telegraphic condensation of the content.

Spring evening, one moment, price thousand gold.
Flowers have fresh odor, moon has shadow.

Singing, piping (comes from the) balcony floor, fine, fine.
Garden swing is motionless, evening drips, drips.

I have added punctuation and words which are understood. The last three words mean that the water in the water-glass which records the evening drips and drips.

What are the difficulties of our sonnet compared to this?

Miss Louise Hammond, of Wusih, in Kiangsu, has recently done some very interesting work in taking down the chanting tunes to which these poems are recited by the Chinese scholars. And to accompany these tunes she has made (see page 252) translations having the same number of syllables as the original poems, the same rhyme-scheme, and reproducing as nearly as possible the rhythmic patterns. The tonal pattern, of course, cannot be reproduced, as we have no equivalent in English. She found that "iambic metre, with a sudden unexpected bang on the seventh syllable where the two stresses come together," was made necessary by the tune. Her translations of these poems show the form, although the reader can judge for himself how much of the content must be omitted in order to bring the English version down to the required number of syllables. These translations, preserving as they do part of the original form, preserve also, to my ears, much of the magic. Whereas the recent free-verse translations, in reproducing the entire content, have been obliged to sacrifice this magic of form which is so essential a part of the Chinese poems.

So much for the complexity. Now to return to the